

THE 1972 INAUGURAL AUSTRALIAN WOMEN'S LACROSSE TOUR

Written by the late Kendrea Kendall and Viv Parker-White with editing
by John Nolan

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The Australian Women's Lacrosse Council (AWLC) accepted an invitation from both the All England Ladies Lacrosse Association (AEWLA) and the United States Women's Lacrosse Association (USWLA) to tour both countries as a follow on from the visit to Australia in 1969 by teams from both countries. Given that 1969 was the first time that Australia had seen women's lacrosse played by other countries the 1972 Tour by an Australian Women's Team, being the first overseas tour by an Australian women's team, was a very important experience, not just for the players concerned but also for the development of women's lacrosse in Australia. The 1972 team was selected immediately after the Australian Championship in Adelaide in July 1970, and a few of the original selections dropped out for various reasons, and were replaced over the two years prior to the team's departure in March 1972. The Victorian team members trained together at Royal Park, with Anne Rowe (Team Captain) overseeing the training, while in Adelaide training was overseen by Barb Mattsson (Team Playing Coach & Vice-Captain) who prepared a training program for the players.

Of course today the preparation and training regime of Australian Teams is far superior now to that of 1972. At that time there was not the oversight or supervision of today and while there were group sessions within South Australia and Victoria there certainly was no opportunity for the team to come together as one prior to departure for overseas. This tour was very much a learning curve in so many respects. The team grew in its match teamwork and its intra-team relationships while learning about each other as they went along, and then the new relationships with host families and the host organisations added to the experience.

The tour was largely funded by the players, costing approximately \$2,000 /player, which in those days was enough for a deposit on an average house valued at \$15,000-16,000. International airfares were very expensive at that time. The SA team members attended a reception with the Acting Lord Mayor of Adelaide and another with the Governor of South Australia, Sir Mark Oliphant, before leaving on tour.

The first Australian women's lacrosse team to travel overseas departed Melbourne on Monday, 6 March 1972, returning two months later on 5 May. This was a very different trip to those undertaken by national teams today. The tour was dubbed the "Women's Weekly World Tour" because it covered so many different places, including quick stopovers in Europe, and the same adage exists today "you are travelling a long way and its costs a lot of money, so get your money's worth".

It was considered a "once in a lifetime" trip, so stopovers in Europe for training and sightseeing were included. When the game schedule finished in the US, the team visited New York then headed to Las Vegas and then on the west coast for some travel, adding Tahiti, Fiji and Noumea as short stay stopovers on the way home.

The Team off-field uniform was designed by the Australian Wool Board and the tracksuits were donated by Ron Clarke on behalf of Adidas, with other Adidas items being provided at a reduced cost. The on-field uniform featured embroidered wattle flowers. Official receptions for the Australian team were organised for each of the countries to be visited through the offices of the then Australian Prime Minister William (Billy) McMahon.

Generally speaking the team was not concerned about the rule interpretations while playing in the UK or the USA. However, there were differences in the style of play employed by teams in both the UK and the USA. The English style of play varied in that their grip on the stick varied to ours, they positioned the 'V' between the thumb and the forefinger immediately below the 'V' of the open front of the stick which allowed them to carry the stick almost vertically and closer to the body. We had been positioning our grip more to the side of the head of the stick. We also noted that their body-positioning was better than ours and was probably aided by the different top hand grip. They also had a beautiful free-flowing game with superb passing between players who were well positioned on the field and moving fast as they both passed and caught the ball. The USA style of play was a little different to that in the UK, skillful and flowing, but a bit less 'lady-like' and at times a bit rough but certainly still very good stick work and positioning overall. Our sticks were at that time being purchased through the UK and so there was no difference in that respect. At that time though it was noted that in some areas there was experimentation going on with regard to the stringing materials of wooden sticks but those sticks were not used in any of our matches. In England at that time they were introducing 7-a-side rules and matches played indoors.

The team was very fortunate to be billeted for the most part by families throughout the UK and the USA. The hospitality put on for the team was wonderful, with the main problem being that our host families on many occasions put on 'special meals'. Being billeted certainly kept our costs down and another up side of that was that many gained life-long friendships through such connections. Due to having been looked after so well probably most ended up coming home a bit heavier than when they left. The team was reliant on the program set by the host organisations as to timing of training along with the allocation of suitable venues as well as the timing of matches, travel, organised events, sightseeing and any free time available as individuals or as a team.

The basic itinerary was as follows:-

7 March - Coached at Hong Kong University, then played against their men's team in an informal match and followed by a University men's versus women's match, followed by a 12 course meal dinner (including 'blood soup') held in the team's honour by the HK University men's team.

8 March - Played an intra-team exhibition game at The Diocesan Girls School in Kowloon, possibly to help promote lacrosse in the area.

10 March – Arrived in Rome. Australian Ambassador’s residence in Rome was the venue for an early afternoon reception with only the Ambassador’s wife and wives of second and third secretaries present. It was thought this was appropriate at the time for a visiting women’s team and we don’t think lacrosse was played at all at that time in Italy. Sightseeing to the Trevi Fountain, Spanish Steps, Coliseum and museums.

12 March – Arrived Munich for training and sightseeing – a light cover of snow and low temperature meant the 1972 training style (Light warm up followed by star jumps etc) added to the injury list.

13 March - Visited the Olympic Village in Munich while it was still under construction. Several team members took the train to the ski fields at Zugspitze to see the snow, with Liz Cheevers hitting the slopes having skied before.

14 March - Visit to the Nymphenburg Castle in Munich prior to departing Munich for a flight to Paris where the team trained and undertook sightseeing around Paris, including the Moulin Rouge and Versailles. Two training sessions in Paris at the Bois de Boulogne which was interesting as this was not a sports ground, but in the park where Roland Garros Stadium is located.

17 March - Arrived in Glasgow met by the Scottish Ladies Lacrosse Association at Paisley Airport and travelled by bus to Largs to stay at the Inverclyde National Recreation Centre

18th March – First International match played at Largs against the Scottish team, the Australian team was very nervous and lost the opener 3 – 13. This was the first official match by the team as a team, prior to the tour we had only played against each other as rival states and there had been no opportunity for the team to come together as a whole prior to departure. The team visited the Yorkshire Moors and were treated to a gathering at a private home and were entertained by a bagpipe player and Scottish dancing.

19 March – Team was taken by bus visiting York Minster, York on the way to Harrogate.

21 March - Harrogate College Tournament – 1st game against Midland lost 3 – 12

“ “ “ “ “ 2nd game v British Universities lost 3 – 7

“ “ “ “ “ 3rd game v The North Team lost 3 – 7

(Made up of players from the counties in the region)

22 March - Travelled by car to Liverpool where we watched a demonstration indoor 7-a-side game (a new innovation) at I. M. Marsh College followed by a reception by the Lord Mayor of Liverpool at the Liverpool Town Hall.

23 March - Travelled by bus to Manchester. Played England at Manchester (Longford Stadium) lost 5 -13

24 March - Flew from Manchester to Heathrow Airport, London.

25 March – Aust v England Reserves at Merton Abbey, lost 2-8. This was prior to a Clubs & Colleges Tournament where the Australian team was scattered through the club teams to play short games of 6 minute halves.

26 March – Free day of sightseeing e.g. Petticoat Lane, the London Zoo, Trafalgar Square, etc.

27 March - Reception for the team at Australia House, London, with the Australian High Commissioner.

28 March - Early practice/training at Gunnersbury Park, followed by a bus tour including the Tower of London, Parliament House, Scotland Yard, Downing Street and Buckingham Palace.

29 March - Aust v Wales 5 – 4, at Merton Abbey, our first win. Best players by umpires: Helen Stevens, Barbara Mattsson & Kendrea Pearson. Followed by a dinner at the Tower of London.

During the Easter break many of the team took a train from Victoria Station to Dover and then ferry to Amsterdam via Oostende and Brussels. Those who travelled stayed at a Student Hostel (bunk rooms and shared bathrooms) and spent the time sightseeing which included a canal boat tour, a flea market visit, a diamond cutting demonstration, cheese making and more, returning to London on 5 April.

5 April – In London the team visited Woburn Abbey Safari Park, training in Rothamsted Park, Harpenden. The team was billeted in London.

6 April - Quadrangle Tournament, St Albans, just north of London.

Aust v East County 6 – 5 Second win!

Aust v West County lost 0 – 3

Aust v South County 2 – 2 draw

7 April - Training in Rothamsted Park, Harpenden

8 April - Aust v Great Britain lost 3 – 15 at Hurlingham Park, London

10 April - Flew to USA. Visited Longwood Gardens in Philadelphia.

11 April - Aust v Philadelphia Colleges 0 – 12, at Conestoga High School, Berwyn Pa. This was a very different game, not the English style of game.

At one stage the Americans played all three homes (forwards) behind their attacking goal, very much the style of men's lacrosse, and played in a boisterous or rough fashion. Soon after the game the President of USWLA apologized to our team for the umpiring standard and advised we would not play in such a rough game for the remainder of US tour.

Helmets were worn by some of the college players and it was a night game!

12 April – Visited an Amish Farm.

13 April – Aust v Philadelphia No.2 team Draw 6 – 6

16 April - Aust v US Reserves 5 – 11: played at Sanford School, Hockessin in Delaware

16 April - Aust v New Jersey 10 – 0 Third win! : again played at Sanford School.

17 April - Trained at the Concord Academy, a high school near Boston and then spent the rest of the day at the races at Suffolk Downs with the 6th race having been name the “Australian Women’s Lacrosse Team’ race.

18 April - Visited the home of Louise M. Alcott, and visited the ‘Minute Men’ Bridge.

19 April - Trained and then went to the baseball at Fenwick Park to see the Red Sox play.

20 April - Saw snow and were treated to a social night where Meryl Howie danced a ‘Kangaroo Corroboree’.

21 April - Aust v New England 9 -6 fourth win! - Played at Concord Academy Boston.

23 April - Australia v USA 6 – 14 played at Greenwich, Connecticut, where national anthems were played pre-match.

This game was the last of the tour, the score was 2 – 12 at half time, and the team gave it everything to outscore the U.S. in second half by 4 goals to 2.

The team finished with four wins, one international win over Wales, county win over East and a draw with the South in Great Britain. In the US wins over New Jersey and New England. The team learnt and experienced so much on this first Australian women’s overseas tour.

24 April - We visited New York, 5th Avenue, Chinatown and the Statue of Liberty. The entourage then flew to Las Vegas arriving late in the afternoon. As Las Vegas was a one-night stop only a few rooms for accommodation were booked and most of the team left their luggage in a room and went out to explore Vegas getting a meal, taking in a show, checking out the casinos, etc.

25 April - Flew to San Francisco where the team was billeted for a few days and got out and about sightseeing.

28 April - Arrived in Anaheim, California – visited Disneyland and/or Knott’s Berry Farm. Played a demonstration game at the University of California, Los Angeles, with the U.S. wanting to introduce lacrosse there.

The entourage headed home by way of Tahiti, Fiji and Noumea as short stay stopovers.



Front row (Left to right): Margot Taylor, Donna Appleby, Meryl Howie, Geraldine Phillis, Kay O'Loughlin, Elizabeth Cheevers, Ann Rowe, Meredith Fowler, Anne Fowler, Paula Stockholm (partly obscured), Dalma Hannan (also partly obscured) Pam Rolley, Pat Farrell & Helen Stevens.

Steps of plane: Barbara Mattsson, Denise O'Connor, Vivienne Parker, Kendrea Pearson.

(Team Manager – Pat Forrester – not in photo)



Above is women's lacrosse equipment for sale, in England, during the 1972 tour.

What did we learn from this amazing tour and what did it do for women's lacrosse in Australia?

The fact that the British and the US teams had visited Australia in 1969, and then followed this with the 1972 overseas tour meant that publicity and promotion was gained and the knowledge that lacrosse for women and girls was open and available across Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia enabled further growth of the sport. In Victoria alone over the years following the 1972 tour the number of clubs in the domestic competition steadily grew, along with the number of teams within the clubs. There was also the pull of players aiming to represent Australia at the international level which provided impetus to grow in skills and knowledge.

Probably the most important outcome, at a national level, of this first overseas women's lacrosse tour was to realize that international competition was essential to progress the level of skills and experience for Australian players if we were to compete on the world stage. Consequently, the AWLC was able to attract visiting teams to Australia and enabled Australian teams to travel. In 1977 the USA toured Australia; in 1978 Great Britain toured Australia; in 1981 the USA toured Australia again; and in 1982 Australia took part in the first Women's World Cup held at Trent Bridge, Nottingham, England – finishing with the silver medal, going down to the U.S.A. in extra time. In 1983 Scotland toured Australia, in 1985 Great Britain again toured Australia; and in 1986 Australia took part in the second Women's World Cup, held at Swarthmore College Pennsylvania USA, winning the gold medal (Australia 10 – USA 7).